

(This message for our Staff calls for thoughtful reading and prayerful consideration. Seldom have I been so uplifted and edified in the preparation of an exhortation for my fellow-workers. In setting forth herein a standard as high as I could, I do not pretend to a zeal or earnestness above my loyal fellow-laborers. I trust that this most responsible position to which you and I are called will subserve the grand and holy cause to which we are unitedly consecrated and committed. And may many "Disciplined Soldiers for Christ" find in us good examples of workmen who need not be ashamed, but who are as established and fixed as the stars in their courses. For myself—I would be stimulated by the concluding exhortation of an eminent minister to his own student and now his pastor: "And now go thy way, O thou son greatly beloved; and work in thy lot lively, and prayerfully, and cheerfully to the end of thy days; and wait and look for what the glorious Lord will do for thee at the end of thy days: in those endless joys, wherein thou shalt shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars forever and ever.")

—L. E. Maxwell

### **GAMALIEL'S POLICY** **(Read Acts 5:17-42)**

This scripture is logically connected with the first blast of persecution in Acts 4, at which time the disciples refused to obey the prohibition on their speaking: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (4:20). They continued to teach and to preach, and for this disobedience they were arrested the second time and imprisoned. However, God next gives His unmistakable approval and credentials them as authorized teachers of the truth. He opens the prison doors and bids them go "early in the morning" into the temple and publicly proclaim "the words of this life" (5:20). In so doing they were venturing far, were actually hazarding their lives, by ignoring the ban on their preaching, and by taking upon themselves the awful and authoritative responsibility of guiding Israel in matters pertaining to eternal life.

It is well to remember that the disciples were in a position at this point in which the stoutest hearts might well quail and tremble. These "ignorant and unlearned men" had no church history back of them, no visible credentials, no earthly sanction, no religious authority to warrant their teaching. But they had just been given a mighty and necessary encouragement through the miraculous release from the prison. With the

fresh consciousness of being authorized to defy the embargo on their preaching they further enraged their persecutors by boldly charging them with the murder of the Saviour: “Him ye slew and hanged on a tree.” But with the charge of guilt they also offered their persecutors the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. And this is where our text begins: “When they heard this, they were cut to the quick [were sawn in two], and were intending to slay them” (NASB).

It is just here that Gamaliel steps forth and thanks to his Counsel of Caution the apostles were set free and the Church was able to go on living and to carry on with the ministry.

## I. COUNSEL OF CAUTION

Yes, his counsel prevailed—albeit only in measure. These religionists could not have their murderous rage easily or completely assuaged. They let the prisoners go free, but **not** without a beating and **not** without a new ban on their preaching. After having beaten them they commanded them “that they should not speak in the Name of Jesus, and let them go” (Acts 5:40).

In the disciples’ circumstances Gamaliel’s advice was a bit of expedient counsel; his counsel of caution: “Take heed. Be not too hasty. Wait a bit. This Jesus movement may collapse. Give it time. Better be undecided for now.”

Let us observe some of the unfavorable aspects of Gamaliel’s counsel of caution.

## II. COUNSEL OF COMPROMISE

Gamaliel’s counsel was a true one for the moment—to mollify the senseless zeal of the persecutors. Of course, it was a **convenient** counsel of religious politicians. But it was a **bad** counsel where men are confronted with choice calling for decision and action at once.

Gamaliel’s counsel of caution, and indecision, his wait-and-see attitude, carries in its bosom a counsel of compromise. For when it comes to Christ and the Christian faith, we cannot be neutral. We cannot adopt a wait-

and-see attitude, cannot wait to see how matters fall before taking our final stand.

This lawyer may be shrewd but with all his good reputation and good counsel of caution he is making one fatal mistake. With his counsel of attempted neutrality and indecision he concludes that the downfall of Jesus of Nazareth has already been settled and failed with His ignominious death. This Jesus-Movement could, therefore, develop along the lines of Theudas and Judas with its as-yet-unseen collapse.

Gamaliel's counsel of compromise, perhaps unconsciously to himself, turned him into an enemy. If we as Christians must wait to see The ultimate issue of the Christian cause, the final outcome of the faith, we will as compromisers finally face the judgment seat of Christ without ever having come to decision.

### III. COUNSEL CONTRARY TO THE CROSS

It is of supreme interest to us to note that the apostles do not follow Gamaliel's policy. They preach the opposite of what Gamaliel thinks and believes and advises and does. They oppose Gamaliel's principles at every point. Theirs was no counsel of caution—they cast caution to the winds. Theirs was no counsel of indecision—they preached Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour to be believed there and then. Theirs was no counsel of compromise—neutral they could not be. They preached that the cause of Jesus crucified, which is their cause, had already been decided by God. And that decision did not depend upon any "wait-and-see" of the future. Nothing about their cause could be changed by any visible circumstance, whether of success or failure. The cause of the apostles was not like that of Theudas and Judas who preached themselves until their cause collapsed. The apostles declared: We preach, not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as the living Lord, and our decision—whether the world acknowledges it or denies it—cannot depend upon any future sign, or upon any success or failure, or upon any circumstance of good or ill, or upon any other special token or outcome. Our decision cannot be made dependent upon any of these visible considerations.

Their decision like that of God has already been settled. They so preach as to create an issue—**now**—that he who does not believe in the Crucified when he hears about Him, decides against Him, even when he

follows the “wait-and-see” policy of Gamaliel, thinking he has avoided making his choice or coming to decision. It is as Jesus said: “He that is not with Me is against Me” (Luke 11:23), and that forbids all neutrality. “He who does not welcome the Cross does not welcome God” (Guyon).

The message of the Cross puts before us the dread alternative: “Either-or.” There is no middle ground. ‘Tis but a case of deciding whether we stand or fall. The Cross issue is of eternal consequence. It is Heaven or hell, life or death, salvation or perdition, and this decision must be made not in some indefinite future day, but **here and now**. so that all neutrality such as that of Gamaliel’s—his counsel of caution and compromise—turns out to be hostility to the Cross of Christ. The Cross confronts us not with a “wait and see” but with a “now or never” decision.

Having embraced the way of the Cross, the apostles departed from the council with bleeding backs and a ban on their preaching. But they were the only rejoicing ones in that conclave of men. Theirs was the joy that came from the divinely wrought certainty that Heaven had long ago determined the final decision. What could they do? Confronted with the Cross only one course lay clearly before them. “Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42 NASB). They knew no fear. They knew no compromise. Already reckoned doomed wretches, they carried on like “dead men on furlough”—like those martyrs who died before they left home.

We might have enlarged upon the above three points, viz.: The Counsel of Caution, The Counsel of Compromise, The Counsel Contrary to the Cross, but we pass on to the main point of this message—

#### **IV. THE COUNSEL OF NON-COMMITTAL**

From here on we want to note how this message is so relevant to our Prairie staff and faculty. Our study thus far lays a foundation for our understanding of how Gamaliel’s counsel of non-committal can possibly become a staff member’s quandary and undoing.

From his presidential chair hear Gamaliel again saying, “If this Jesus Movement be of men it will come to naught; if it be of God, you cannot overcome it. So just refrain from these men, take heed, be neutral, just sit on

the fence, wit; yes, wait and see.” This policy may be considered wisdom, but it is but the masterful “counsel of indecision” where decision is imperative.

Such a specious policy can be a great temptation, however sincere and well advised it maybe intended to be. For this counsel may persuade us to look upon human advice and human work and judge matters by human success or human failure. o look upon what is visible, upon outward results—the cry of the hour is for Results, Results—to found our confidence in some way upon what we call the practical outworking in the way of success or failure, is to become confounded. If we regard external results the unflinching test of its character, we mistakenly conclude: This work **succeeds**—it is **divine**; this movement **fails**—it is **human**.

Let me illustrate. Well meaning people are often lavish with their congratulations: “Oh, how God has blessed your work here at Prairie—it is so evidently God—owned and God-blessed.” While duly appreciating their generous observation, we often feel that such persons see only a bit of the **fruit** without the **root**, only the **building** without the **bedrock**. Many of these self-same persons, should they sense that we begin to suffer some set-back, can quickly conclude: the testings Prairie is going through make it evident that God is no longer blessing the work.

The test of external results is therefore not an absolutely safe test. Are we then not to aim for results? Far from it! Let us never be content with a lack of results. And let us ever and always as far as possible seek to eliminate every human cause of failure. Let us have all the success we can get: as many consecrations, as many students, as many disciplined soldiers for Christ, as many Christian workers as possible. Only let us not look on external results as furnishing the unflinching test of the character of our work. This is the Gamaliel policy.

Remember that our work is in a real sense still in its infancy. We still have plenty against us in the way of hostility and prejudice and reproach, much on account of our simple discipline. Not all men speak will of us. When they do, then Gamaliel and his friends will be all too ready to side in with the successful cause. But we are still in those days when Gamaliels look on us askance, with timid, neutral, cautious and perhaps with doubting eyes. As long as interest flags the Gamaliels will refrain from identifying

themselves too closely with “Three Hills.” But let Prairie become more established and reputable and then the cautious crowd can climb aboard without ever having to embrace the Cross.

The temptation to look upon outward success or popularity or public endorsement can have more influence over us than we are prepared to admit. “Noting succeeds like success” —becomes our worldly-wise slogan. If, or when, success wanes, then our loyalty withers. Our trouble is that we are not fixed, not anchored, not Cross-centered, not nailed as we must needs be. We are still non-committal, and that can be fatal.

Robert Murray McCheyne made this appropriate observation: “Men return again and again to the few who have mastered the spiritual secret, whose life has been hid with Christ in God. These are of the old time religion, hung to the nails of the Cross.”

What is the mystic secret of the early Church? She was hung to the nails of the Cross—”The Church was born crucified.” (Pascal)

Have we ever considered that the success of the original Christian church cannot be explained on the supposition that it was of merely human origin? If its only inspiration had been in weak, frail, feeble, faulty and deluded men, it most certainly would early have gone down to everlasting oblivion. But the Christian system, unlike the religions of the world, was in no way likely to commend success, and that for the following reasons (largely from Bishop Pearson in J.F.B.):

1. Christianity condemned all other religions, some established for ages.
2. Christianity laid down precepts contrary to, and ungrateful to, flesh and blood—the mortifying of the flesh, the love of enemies, the turning of the other cheek, going the second mile, rejoicing in tribulation, and bearing of the Cross.
3. Christianity enforces these seemingly unreasonable precepts by promises seemingly incredible—not good things such as afford complacency to our senses, but such as cannot be obtained till after this life, and presupposes what seemed impossible, the Resurrection.

4. It predicts to its followers what would keep most men from embracing it, persecutions, and going through much tribulation.

5. Christ's disciples were sent forth as lambs in the midst of wolves, as doves to outwit serpents, as the lame to take the prey! With that likelihood of success?

But the early Church could have said and sung:

“In the Cross of Christ I glory  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime.”

When Admiral Byre some years ago spent the winter near the South Pole for the purpose of scientific research, he left his hut one night to walk in the fresh air. He wheeled about suddenly horrified. No sign of his hut was visible. There was absolutely nothing about him that could give him a sense of direction. Snow and cold and polar wastes enveloped him. He knew that if he were to strike out and fail in the first attempt to locate his hut, he would be lost. All sense of direction would be gone. He would stumble about in a vain search, and finally freeze to death. But he had with him along stake, which he drove into the ice: “There is my center; if I do not find my hut, I can return to it.” Three times he struck out in search of his hut; each time failing to find it, he returned to his center without which he would have been as lost as the proverbial needle in the haystack. In the fourth attempt he stumbled upon his shack and was saved.

If we are puzzled, mystified, shrouded, “stumbling about in a vain search” for God's direction, in our **way and walk and work**, it may be we have forsaken our former fixedness at Calvary. As Christians, we must “return again and again” to the divinely fixed stake, the Cross. IF we fail to do so, we shall be swallowed up in a night for more mystifying than that which shrouded Admiral Byrd.

Says a certain writer (as quoted by Richard Wolf): “Once in a public park at Jacksonville, Florida, we heard another spectator of a chess game say of a certain move, ‘That's it!’ He meant thought he other contestant might

squirm for a time, even for a long time, that one move had determined the outcome. The rivals might not know the victorious import of that move, and the other spectators might not know, but that particular on-looker (with his secret perception) knew: ‘That’s it!’”

In a real sense the Bible plays the role of that one perceptive and discerning man. By faith, faith being response to the beckoning and grasp of the Cross, the Bible says of the total Christ-event in history **“That’s it!”** At the Cross God has made one final move in our human story and His word is unalterably fixed and “shall not return unto Him void.”

The Rev. I. M. Haldeman once said concerning the majesty of God’s move at Calvary: “The moving forces which came out of that blood-red scene at Calvary was the belief that God was there, there in all the majesty of inexorable law, and all the wrath of His essential antagonism to sin; that He was there revealing Himself as the God who can by no means clear the guilty, and yet there as the God who in the midst of wrath remembered mercy, the God whose final essence was love, and who sought with all the genius of God to find a righteous channel for the outflow of His love in saving value to sinful men.”

Our chief trouble is that we forget, if we ever knew, how deep is the claim of the Cross upon our redeemed lives. We can but continue to be fruitless failures if we think that as pardoned sinners we are through with the Cross. In a very real sense we have only begun. We must be “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus” That we may be making room for the Resurrected One in living power. “The death-mark is forever with Him in resurrection power. The path is plain. It is the Calvary road.

But we have inherited very shallow, insipid conceptions of the Cross! “The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said good-bye to his friends. He was not coming back. He was not going out to have his life redirected; he was going out to have it ended.” (Tozer) Only as we bear the marks of the Crucified can we bear the image of the Victorious One.

Concerning the majestic claim as well as the mysterious charm of the Cross, F. J. Huegel says:

“Never did king lay hold of the heart of a subject, nor maiden the soul of an enamored youth, nor vision the mind of a prophet, nor melody the spirit of a musician, as the Cross lays hold of the life of the saint. And this in the face of a judgment so adverse to the soul’s selfish interests that it spells death. How strange—the Cross of Christ makes inroads into our ‘self life’ with the force of a terrible army bent on utter destruction. Yet we cannot resist its attractive force... the Cross becomes the breath of our breath, the soul of our soul, the Central Spring of our being.”

Such is “the moving force that comes out of that Blood-red scene.” **That’s it! There** is the supreme attraction. **There** we are laid hold of. **There** we become God-enamored, Christ-captured, Cross-smitten. **There** God moved. And that move, as far as we are concerned, has determined our decision, our dedication, our direction, our destiny. Our die is cast, our decision irreversible. That one “move” did it. Squirm as we may, the issue has been decided, the contest won. Let the outlook be fair or foul. Come failure, come success; come good, come ill; come light, come darkness. The Cross-mold has us. **We never know until we re tested whether we are totally committed.** and testing can only come by tribulations.

“Need I that a law should bind me  
Captive unto Thee;  
Captive is my heart, rejoicing  
Never to be free.”

But—the Cross of Jesus! Identified there? Nailed there? Is that not failure and loss and desolation? Unanointed eyes can see nothing there but utter defeat. How easy to forget that all our salvation hangs on the death of God’s Son—not through His Messianic success, but through His weakness, His death! Apart from faith, yes, the dead reckoning of obedient faith, our untouched eyes can see nothing in the Cross but shame and reproach and failure.

Unless we have a long look of total committal the Crucified One is a total failure. Oh yes, the path of the Cross may lead me home—hereafter. But—paralyzing thought! —it now carries me “whither I would not,” to complete liquidation. Yet it is precisely there—there God moved—**that’s**

**it**” —there in the place of apparent failure God reveals Himself, and I can triumph—”hung to the nails of the Cross.” The personal question so searching: Am I **there**? Am I committed? —beyond recall? —past the point of no return?

Did Martin Luther say, “Here I stand; God helping me I can do no other?” Let me put the point in my own personal Prairie context: “Here I hang—to the nails of the Cross” —God helping me I can do no other.”

My heart indicts a good matter. Oh the wonder of it all! Do I seem to have wandered? I believe not. Let me regather some of my fragmented thoughts. I have made reference to times of testing and temptation. They come to us all. But as we travel the Cross road where all appears to be gloom and doom the temptation can be terrorizing as we look on things seen.

When some ill winds strike Prairie—when there comes some shriveling, some shrinking, some diminishing, some failure or fall-off, we can begin to glance, perhaps only mentally if not verbally, at success or failure, or we can consider some counsel of caution to sustain our wavering faith!

We dare to emphasize: When there comes—as there may—some slump in missionary giving, in recruits, in financial response, in student fall off, in staff drop out, in lack of personnel and teachers and helpers—are we tempted in such times of testing to suspect that maybe Gamaliel’s policy was right after all? Then insinuations come crowding in thick and fast—in many forms. Maybe this work is of men? Is it coming to naught? If it be of God—success should be evident. After all, this movement may be mostly of men. If it is of God, why all this trouble? Is God still with us? Who says this work is of God? Maybe Prairie standards are only of men. There seems to be something wrong around here. Is there some Achan in the camp? It looks as though things are all “going to pot.” Now “I, even I only am left.”

How hissing are these missiles! Right hot from the armory of the enemy! Do you begin to muse with yourself? I recall that day when I glowingly said: “If it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.” And I came—came to Prairie. Venturing all, I dared to tread some hitherto untrodden waters. But now I feel myself sinking. Was my first love a mere emotion? My first faith a blind presumption? What men all these surging billows?

Do I wish myself on shore,  
Never to forsake it more?

In such an hour God seems to say to us, “Gather my saints together; those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” (Psalm 50:5)

“**That’s it**” — that was what once gathered us together. **There** we were drawn—around the Great Sacrifice. That was what moved us. That was the supreme attraction. “We could no resist its attractive force.” T’was a covenant of total committal. Now comes the question: Is that spirit of sacrifice “the spiritual secret” which still binds us? In the midst of tests and subtle temptations must we cry out once and again, “Bind the sacrifice with cords even to the horns of the altar?” (Psalm 118:27) By love’s constraining power, Lord, bind us there, keep us there. “Squirm” as we may, “squirm for a time,” even for a long time, but Lord keep us **there** throughout the whole of life. Let us “return again and again to the few (they are always a minority) who have mastered the spiritual secret, whose life has been hid with Christ in God. These are of the old time religion, hung to the nails of the Cross.”

Years ago I had a conversation with a former graduate who had become enamored with worldly wisdom and fleshly rationalization. He was not a liberal, but already a victim of “the thing mostly to be feared in theology, viz., pure intellectualism.” (Godet) He counseled me with much concern and solicitude. Though he had begun to “Die by Degrees,” he still loved Prairie. When he heard a highly “degreed” preacher from his seminary was coming to us as a conference speaker, he was pleased that Prairie was going to experience that highly prized an delectable intellectual touch which would so add to her simplicity. Speaking of our teachers (of those days), he said: “If it were not for you and Miss Miller, Prairie would be **on the rocks.**” When I later divulged to Miss Miller this young scholar’s extravagant concern for us, she almost gleefully commented: “**Oh, we’ve always been there.**”

Yes, she knew we were there—”on the rocks” —had always been there. In fact, Prairie was born there—”Born Crucified” —begotten outside the camp of intellectual respectability. (“On the rocks” is incidentally a great place for a lighthouse. **There** men will come to see you shine, or burn—or both).

Do we itch to be elsewhere? other where? or anywhere? just to escape the stigma of being reckoned nondescript? We must remember when we come into the strait place, whether of position or reputation or finance or threatening prospect, that every Jacob-like attempt to establish ourselves on a better basis, every secret hope dependent upon Prairie's success or failure, or any secret glance at any Gamaliel's counsel and support will have the opposite effect and we shall be swallowed up, engulfed 'neath waves of foundering and uncertainty.

I recall the striking translation of Psalm 96:10:

“Say unto the peoples: The Lord reigneth **from the Tree.**” (Italica Antiqua)

“The truth that David learned to sing,  
Its deep fulfillment her attains;  
‘Tell all the earth the Lord is King!’  
Lo, from the Cross, a King He reigns!”

—Mrs. Charles

At Calvary God moved. That historic move on God's part has settled all His decisions—**and yours and mine.** No visible success or failure in the future can change our course or cause. **There** God has finalized all issues, has already decided the outcome.

Gamaliel's counsel of non-committal only leaves us in the lurch, disturbed, disestablished, uncertain, unsettled. But at Calvary I remain forever fixed—established, strengthened, settled. **That's It!** There, **precisely there,** God's love triumphs. There is God's unfailing counsel; there unfailing faith, the faith of total committal, carries me through to win the well-fought day!

—L. E. Maxwell